



Frequently Asked Questions on the Distribution of the Precious Blood

1. Why do we call the Eucharist, the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Source and Summit of our Catholic Faith?

As members of the Catholic faith we have always held the belief that Jesus is present to us in a unique and wonderful way. This presence is real and tangible. It is a presence that we can see, feel and even taste. It is known to us as the Eucharist and the Blessed Sacrament. It is Jesus' gift to us at the Last Supper and made explicit in His sacrifice on the cross.

Our bishops invite us to remember that the Eucharist constitutes "the Church's entire spiritual wealth, that is, Christ Himself, our Passover and living bread. It is the 'Sacrament of Sacraments.' Through it 'the work of our redemption is accomplished.' He who is the 'living bread that came down from heaven' (Jn 6:51) assures us, 'Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink'" (Jn 6:54-55).¹

The Eucharist is celebrated each day by the Church in the Mass. We gather with Christ's priest to read and proclaim His Word which prepares us to receive Him in the Blessed Sacrament.

2. What is the Eucharist?

The Eucharist is the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. For centuries, the Church has used the term "transubstantiation" to describe the reality of Jesus truly being present under the appearance of bread and wine. Thus, the Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist can be defined as "a wonderful and unique conversion of the total substance of the bread into the total substance of the Body of Christ and the total subsistence of the wine into the total substance of the Blood of Christ with only the species (form, taste, smell) of bread and wine remaining."

Further truths about the Eucharist reveal that it is a true sacrifice, a true meal, a true memorial, an effective sign of unity and charity, a source of forgiveness, and is necessary for our growth in holiness.

3. What is the general history of Communion under the form of the Precious Blood?

“From the first days of the Church's celebration of the Eucharist, Holy Communion consisted of the reception of both species in fulfillment of the Lord's command to ‘take and eat take and drink.’ The distribution of Holy Communion to the faithful under both kinds was thus the norm for more than a millennium of Catholic liturgical practice. The practice of Holy Communion under both kinds at Mass continued until the late eleventh century, when the custom of distributing the Eucharist to the faithful under the form of bread alone began to grow.”²

The Church Fathers at Vatican II reinstated and reaffirmed the practice in the 1963 document *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy). Since then the Diocese of Manchester embraced the practice in its parishes and institutions. The bishop reaffirmed the practice of distribution of communion under both forms when he promulgated the Guidelines for Care and Celebration of the Eucharist in the Diocese of Manchester in 2000.

With the advent of the new General Instruction of the Roman Missal 3rd Typical Edition in 2001 (and the new English translation of the Missal in 2011) a new emphasis and affirmation was placed on the practice for all dioceses and parishes. Finally, to clarify any misunderstandings and to renew its proper practice, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops issued the Norms for the Distribution of Communion under Both Forms (2002) with clarification from the Congregation of Divine Worship in Rome document *Redemptionis Sacramentum* (2004) on the proper celebration of the Mass.

These official documents all share that it is the responsibility of the bishop to promote and regulate the distribution of Communion under the form of the Precious Blood in his diocese.

4. What should I know about the current practice of distribution of the Precious Blood of Our Lord in the Diocese of Manchester?

This past Advent all the parishes were invited to begin a time of reflection, evaluation and catechesis concerning the Precious Blood. The cessation of distributing Communion from the chalice for the faithful was begun as a pastoral impetus for the reflection (to grow deeper in our devotion) and evaluation (to make sure that the distribution of the Precious Blood was being done with reverence and following the Church's procedures). We have now entered the catechetical phase to prepare us for the re-institution of this practice beginning on Holy Thursday at the celebration of the Mass of the Lord's Supper.

5. What has the reflection period produced?

The reflection period was a time to recall the gift of the Eucharist which Jesus gave to us at the Last Supper. It was at that time, that first Holy Thursday, that he told his disciples to “take this (bread) all of you and eat it, for this is my body,” and likewise, “take this all of you (the chalice of wine) and drink from it from it, for it is the cup of my blood, the blood of the new and everlasting covenant.” This directive of Jesus' to “take and eat,” and to “take and drink” recalls the Eucharistic teaching (John 6) that “whoever eats my body and drinks my

blood will have eternal life.” Thus, the Eucharist, the Body and Blood of our Lord, is the source and summit of the faith of the Catholic disciple.

6. *What has the evaluation period of the form of distribution of the Precious Blood produced?*

The evaluation stage has allowed us to assess our practice of distribution by challenging us to review the quality of the wine, the quality of the chalices, and each parish’s procedure for distribution of the Precious Blood and purification of vessels.

7. *What does the catechetical period include?*

In a recent letter to all the priests, pastors and religious of the diocese the bishop stated his catechesis will include:

- A reflection based on Sacred Scriptures, specifically the Old Testament sources of Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy with the observance of the Passover Seder.
- A New Testament reflection of our encounter with Jesus in the Gospels through His public ministry prior to the Last Supper and Passion.
- A closing reflection on the Institution Narrative as seen in the Synoptics Gospels and the Bread of Life Discourse of John’s Gospel.

Only after study and reflection on these important Scriptural references will we have the necessary preparation to approach with awe the practicum, not as instruction on mere logistics, but as nothing less than re-appreciating the reverence due to such an awesome reality.

Finally, with this catechesis in place the reintroduction of the distribution and reception of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds according to the Universal norms, the USCCB norms, and thus, local diocesan norms will commence on Holy Thursday.

8. *What do we mean when we say that Communion under both forms (the Eucharistic Bread and the Precious Blood) is a “fuller sign” within the Rite of Communion with our Lord?*

Jesus Christ, Incarnate, Crucified and Risen, body and blood, soul and divinity is truly and fully present when we communicate under the form of the Host only. This is known as the virtue of concomitance. Thus, nothing is held back from Christ’s true presence or his grace when we receive under one form only. However, we use the term, “fuller sign” when we receive under both species (Body and Blood) as we engage in our Lord’s desire that we “take and eat, take and drink”.

“Holy Communion has a more complete form as a sign when it is received under both kinds. For in this manner of reception a fuller sign of the Eucharistic banquet shines forth. Moreover there is a clearer expression by which the new and everlasting covenant is ratified

in the blood of the Lord and of the relationship of the Eucharistic banquet to the eschatological banquet in the Father's kingdom.”³

Priests and pastors are encouraged to teach about the unity of the Sacrament which states that, “according to Catholic faith, Christ, whole and entire, as well as the true Sacrament are received under one Kind only; that, therefore, as far as the effects are concerned, those who receive in this manner are not deprived of any grace necessary for salvation.”⁴

This practice and approach is echoed in the General Instruction of 2001 and later by the Vatican in the document *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, “So that the fullness of the sign may be made more clearly evident to the faithful in the course of the Eucharistic banquet, lay members of Christ’s faithful, too, are admitted to Communion under both kinds, in the cases set forth in the liturgical books, preceded and continually accompanied by proper catechesis regarding the dogmatic principles on this matter laid down by the Ecumenical Council of Trent.”⁵

9. What do we need to do be able to receive the Precious Blood?

As Catholics, we fully participate in the celebration of the Eucharist when we receive Holy Communion. We are encouraged to receive Communion devoutly and frequently. In order to be properly disposed to receive Communion, participants should not be conscious of grave sin and normally should have fasted for one hour. A person who is conscious of grave sin is not to receive the Body and Blood of the Lord without prior sacramental confession except for a grave reason where there is no opportunity for confession. In this case, the person is to be mindful of the obligation to make an act of perfect contrition, including the intention of confessing as soon as possible (canon 916). A frequent reception of the Sacrament of Penance is encouraged for all.⁶

Other directives for the Reception of Holy Communion are published by the USCCB and can usually be found in your missalette or liturgical aid.

¹ Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion under Both Kinds in the Dioceses of the United States of America 2002. #3.

² *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (SC), no. 55, Cf. Norms, no. 17.

³ Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds for the Dioceses of the United States of America (Norms), no. 20, citing General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM), no. 281.

⁴ General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM), no. 281, cf. *Redemptionis Sacramentum* (RS), no. 100.

⁵ *Redemptionis Sacramentum* 100

⁶ USCCB Guidelines for the Reception of Holy Communion, 1996.